



State of Wisconsin
Department of Public Instruction
Elizabeth Burmaster, State Superintendent

*****NEWS RELEASE*****

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

DPI 2008-82

Friday, May 9, 2008

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Two educators receive Presidential Teaching Awards

MADISON—State Superintendent Elizabeth Burmaster commended two educators, who were among 99 nationwide to receive Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching earlier this spring.

Jeanine Lynn Gelhaus, an eighth-grade science teacher at Medford Middle School, and Lorna Thomas Vazquez, mathematics teacher at Granton High School, traveled to Washington, D.C., April 28 to May 3 for recognition week activities. They attended meetings to collaborate with colleagues on the latest issues in mathematics and science teaching and were honored at a Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching awards ceremony.

“These teachers exemplify good teaching that is focused on student achievement,” Burmaster said. “Both of Wisconsin’s Presidential Teaching Award recipients have earned National Board Certification, a rigorous process that demonstrates their devotion to their profession and children’s learning.”

As nominees for the Presidential Teaching Awards program, Gelhaus and Vazquez submitted a videotaped lesson, written responses to questions about their instructional practice, sample student work, and a resume of their background and experience. A national committee reporting to the White House and the National Science Foundation judged state-level finalists on their contributions to teaching and learning and their ability to help students make progress in mathematics and science.

Gelhaus is described by one parent as the best teacher her son has ever had. “He simply loves coming to science,” the parent said. Her videotaped lesson explored energy transfer, a broad topic that can be difficult for young learners to grasp. She engaged her students in various hands-on mini-labs. In one, students investigated energy transfer by observing initial and ending temperatures of a small beaker of cold water before and after placing it in a large beaker of hot water.

(more)

Lessons don't end when students head home. Gelhaus reflects on each unit asking, "Did we accomplish what I had hoped to?" and "What will I do differently next time based on the learning and responses of my students?" Reflection, she says, helps her reconstruct the experience and direct her future teaching practice, which will ensure that her students are learning and achieving at high levels.

A "staff development junkie," as her principal describes, Vazquez is someone who "takes great pride in personal and professional development." Her yearly celebrations of Pi Day, which is March 14 each year, are but one example of a philosophy that mathematics should be fun, visible, and hands-on.

Vazquez connects challenging mathematics to real-world situations. Her lesson on attempting to determine the missing dimensions of a triangle, where given side-side-angle, a unique triangle cannot always be determined comes to life as students plot where an ice cream stand would be located. They must think critically and reflectively when the building ends impossibly in a pond.

"As the only secondary math teacher in my district, I can closely follow my students' mathematical growth over the years," she said. "I can see how their reasoning and communications skills progress over time, anticipate difficulties, identify misconceptions as they begin to develop, and intervene early." Vazquez creates a classroom that supports students' taking mathematical risks and learning from their mistakes.

"Quality teachers in every classroom is a fundamental principal of our New Wisconsin Promise," Burmaster said. "These educators are to be commended for their contributions to increase student achievement and close the achievement gap."

In addition to visiting the nation's capitol, Gelhaus and Vazquez received \$10,000 from the National Science Foundation, which can be spent over three years at the teachers' discretion; a citation signed by the president; and gifts from program sponsors from around the country.

Since 1983, more than 3,700 outstanding teachers have been recognized for their contributions to mathematics and science education through the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.

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